

# Eli Enlo Lines

*"There was nobody like Eli"*



*(1922 - 2009)*

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a Nephew  
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## ***Introduction***

The story that follows would *never* have been possible, in fact there'd be little to tell, were it not for the contribution of others. For many years I've felt my uncle's life story was worthy of being told, remembered and passed down to generations yet to come. But, despite my encouragement that together we write his life's story, Eli flat-out said *no*. He probably had no idea over all those years but, with my background as a broadcast journalist and writer, with an insatiable interest in our family history, he was *a/ways* being interviewed.

On a number of occasions when I had the privilege of visiting with him at his home in Akron, Ohio we'd talk at some length about his experiences. Sometimes those conversations would occur over the phone. Eli was never one who *wanted* to talk about himself, but he'd always answer my questions. He never refused an answer but there were a few times he was reluctant to provide one. Regarding his days in the army, his wife Mary was surprised about our conversations, saying, "he never talks about the war with anyone." But for some reason, he would with me.

On one visit in November of 1987, I asked him if he'd allow me to tape record his memories. Again, his answer was an emphatic "no", "besides" he said, "no one's interested." I think he was wrong about that but he was a humble man. He later told me in January of 1993, "Rich, the only thing you really need to know, is that I was your uncle, and I *a/ways* loved you."

As you'll come to know, Eli had few happy memories as a boy. His experience in war, as often is the case, were painful memories as well. While he was willing to share a bit of that pain, he once told me "there's too much I'd rather not talk about." So, there's a lot we don't know about him. But what we *do* know is a powerful example of one man's determination to overcome all he had endured, beginning at a very early age, and through deliberate choice make the best of it. Eli always hoped to make his life worthwhile. He was ambitious and wanted "to be somebody", to "show the people back home that a Lines could amount to something."

I like telling stories and write frequently in my blog, *Stories I Share With Friends*.<sup>1</sup> I'm the curious type and even complete strangers aren't spared my tendencies of wanting to know more. I just like getting to know people. During the years following my uncle's death, I had a number of conversations with aunt Mary. She freely provided stories and memories which

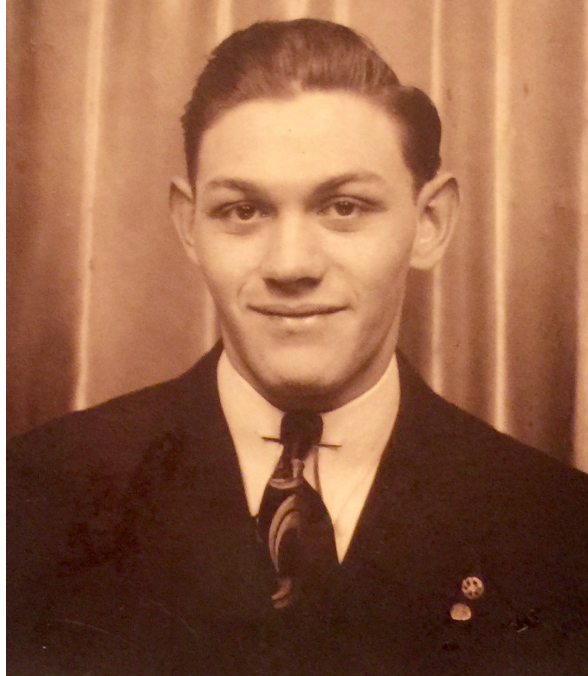
added substantially to their story. Of course, I asked a lot of questions but, had I thought to ask other questions, there could have been a lot more we would have learned about Eli and Mary, their lives and their long, successful marriage together.

Their daughters Judy and Laura also shared their memories about their parents during numerous conversations and emails. And like I did with their mother, I asked an abundance of questions, wanting to make sure their father's story was told in full, and as accurately as possible. I'm sure, being as detail oriented as I am, I was a nuisance at times, but they answered all of my questions as best they could. Judy and Laura are rightfully very proud of their parents. Judy said of her father, "He was my hero, my love and admiration for him is beyond measure." and I firmly believe the stories of our heroes need to be shared and remembered.

Uncle Eli didn't realize it, but after each of our talks, even if they took place during the day while we were out and about, I'd always find a way to write down notes outside his presence. Sometimes a brief bathroom break would allow me ample opportunity to catch up. Most of those talks took place in the evening and afterward I'd go to my bedroom where, for the next hour or so, I'd write down all I could remember of the conversation, the things I wanted to pass on. Then later, if I had any doubts about getting the details *right*, I'd ask him for clarification, ask questions or say, "Tell me that story again". I always wanted to someday take *all* those disjointed notes I had gathered, over *all* those years, and attempt to weave them into a cohesive narrative, as best I could.

In sharing the events of Eli's life a lot of blood, sweat and literal tears have gone into this work. Not everything that's worthy of sharing about my personal relationship with him is included in these pages. These were personal things and memories not germane to *his* story, but more so to my own. Suffice to say, there was a strong bond between my uncle, aunt Mary and myself. I know it had a lot to do with my being his younger brother's son who had died at an early age in 1955. Being only two years apart, there's no doubt he and my father were close and I became the benefactor of that earlier relationship, but there was more. Someday I might add that part of our story in an updated revision, but right now it's all about Eli. Remembering and writing about him has been a constant reminder of how much I enjoyed his company. I miss his kindness and gentle spirit. How truly grateful I am to have known him and to have been his nephew. Like my father, he is never far from my thoughts.

This biography did not come easy and was a task involving several years and dozens, likely hundreds of hours of repeated and painstaking writing, rewriting and editing. As I'd discover more about my uncle, the circle would start again. To say the least, sharing his story has been important to me and was a long time in coming. Now, after all these years of faithful preparation, to honor and remember a man who was truly deserving, this is the result of my endeavor. His story *finally* begins here.



### ***Youth (Curwensville to Akron)***

Eli Enlo Lines was born on June 8, 1922, in the little borough of Curwensville, Clearfield County, Pennsylvania. He was the tenth of twelve children born to his parents, Harry Wilbur Lines and Nora Agnes Wertz. Two older brothers, Monroe and Melvin had died as infants in 1910 and 1921.

Eli was named after his paternal grandfather and his middle name came from Enlo Wisor<sup>2</sup>. Enlo, a neighbor and friend of his oldest sister Ruby, was 14 years old when Eli was born. It was said Eli's parents just liked the name. Later in life his wife and her family always referred to him as "Red." Given the name because his hair, in the days they met, had a slightly tinted red color to it. No one however on his side of the family ever called him anything but Eli.

Like his brothers and sisters, Eli's life as a child was not an easy one, complicated by an absent father, who provided very little in the way of emotional or financial support. His mother was burdened with overwhelming responsibilities and, by the spring of 1926 with the birth of her youngest child John, Nora had at least seven children at home to care for. With the onset of the Great Depression, in the fall of 1929, Eli was just seven years old and it was often a struggle just to have something to eat. Eli spoke on occasion about how rough it was for him in those days. He told me he was hungry so often, "I felt like my belly

button was rubbing against my backbone."

Eli's parents would go their separate ways and by the fall of 1935 his mother was living with another man Marlie Ellinger. In the 1940 census, while living in the same household, Nora is listed as a "Housekeeper." Thirteen years later Nora and Marlie would marry and remain together until her death in 1963.

In 1936 at the tender age of eleven, still in the depths of the depression, Eli found himself homeless. I never asked why. His daughter Judy remembers her father speaking about two especially troubling conversations her father had with his parents as a young boy. One exchange was with his mother when he told her, "You love Marlie more than you do me." In reply, she said, "Marlie does more for me than you do." On yet another occasion Eli saw his father on a street in Curwensville. He approached his dad, who was with someone else, and asked if he could have a nickel. His father acted like he had *no idea* who Eli was and abruptly rejected him. One can only imagine the effect these experiences would have had on a young, impressionable boy.

Many evenings Eli told me he would be downtown in Curwensville at eight in the evening with no idea where he was going to spend the night. Sometimes Eli would sneak inside the courthouse and sleep in the judge's chair. In talking about those days and their tough, undisciplined childhood his younger brother John once told me; "That Eli was one rough character. Eleven years old and packing a 38 revolver."



*Eli on the Left - On the right (L to R) are Brothers John, Richard (the author's father) & Eli*

Eli eventually found himself standing before the same judge, who's chair he'd slept in, for truancy. He'd been there before and the judge asked, "Eli, what am I going to do with you?" Eli told the judge he'd like to go to the Glen Mills School, where his older brother Web had been a few years earlier.<sup>3</sup> The judge agreed and Eli spent an unknown length of time there. He told me on several occasions how he often thought about returning to the school, which is still in operation. He wanted to share his thoughts with the boys living there, hoping he could be an influence in their lives. Glen Mills has been described as, "the country's most radical and, some say, its most effective answer yet to juvenile crime." It is the oldest facility of its kind in the United States.

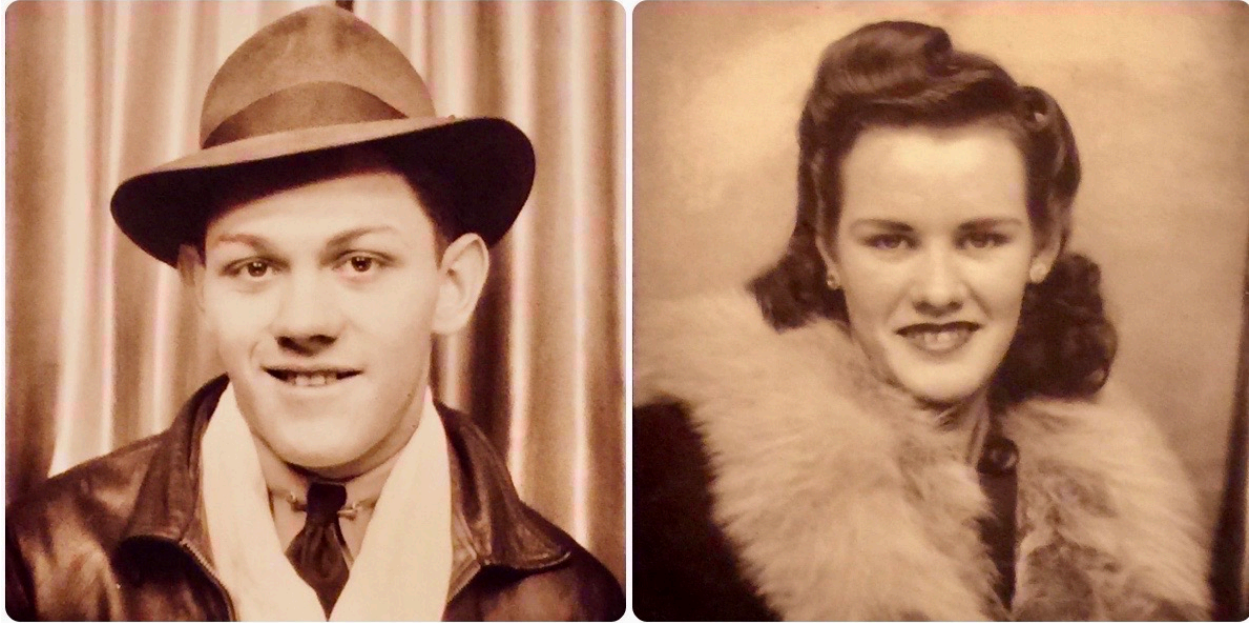
For a while, sometime after he left Glen Mills, Eli, by then a teenager, went to live with his sister Maxine and her husband Jim Veihdeffer. The two had for a time become his legal guardians. I believe this would have been in Curwensville, where the couple once lived. How long he was there I'm not sure, but when Jim found out Maxine had allowed Eli to drive their car, which Jim had expressly forbidden, Eli was told he had to leave.

Eli, with his younger brother Richard, is found in the May 1940 Census living with their maternal grandmother, 79-year old Hannah Wertz. Her home was located at 277 Bailey Road in Curwensville and at this writing still exists. Referred by her grandchildren as "Granny" or "Granny Wertz" Hannah cared for several of Eli's siblings over the years and was revered for the loving and caring woman she was to them.

As a teenager, Eli joined the Civilian Conservation Corps<sup>4</sup>, a creation of President Franklin Roosevelt. He ended up somewhere in Arizona in "C C Camp" earning \$30 a month. He became a leader among his group and held the program in high regard saying, "it helped change my life." I have no idea what he did in Arizona or how long he was there but, when he returned from the southwest, he got off the train in Akron knowing his older sister Ruby was living there. He said his sister was "hell to live with", it was church on Sunday, and several other days of the week and, a lot of bible reading in-between. Eventually, he managed to get himself kicked out of the house by purposely getting drunk. He said he didn't want his sister to feel bad by just leaving, so he drank to give her a good excuse to throw him out. It was probably one of the very few times if ever again, Eli drank to excess. While several of his siblings did drink, often in an effort to self-medicate their memories and sorrows away, he was among those who did not.

Sometime in the early 40s, Eli got a job at an A&P Grocery store as a stock boy. It was the first A&P<sup>5</sup> in Akron. While renting a room, he was walking to work one day and noticed an exceptionally beautiful, dark-haired girl living with her family in one of the houses along the street. Her name was Mary Donahoe. Eli was outgoing and friendly and stopped in front of the house to engage the Donahoe brothers in conversation about cars and other things. He would glance over at Mary from time-to-time as she sat on the porch listening in. He told me, with a wink, a grin and a slight nod of his head, "The first time I saw her, I knew right then and there I was going to marry her." It was love at first sight. As things progressed, every so often Eli would change rooming houses, located all along the street, until he was living directly across from Mary's house. Mary's father was very much against their relationship, no one today really knows why but Mary was forced to sneak out of the house to spend time with Eli. They'd often go roller skating at a local rink. Her mother knew about the secret meetings but kept it to herself, no doubt because of Eli's charm and good manners.





*Eli and Mary - Mary's Dated January 15, 1943*

### ***The War Years (Normandy and Europe)***

Following the great depression of the 1930s, Adolph Hitler's Nazi Germany and Emperor Hirohito's Imperial Japan ignited the Second World War. Bent on world domination, these two dictatorships came close to succeeding. Nazi Germany's war was unlike any the world had ever known. Combining cutting edge 20th-century technology, with a deliberate policy of genocide, the Nazi regime industrialized mass murder and in the process killed millions of innocent civilians. Then on December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked the American Navy at Pearl Harbor plunging the United States into World War II. Two months later 19-year-old Eli married his 18-year-old sweetheart on February 23, 1942. Together Mary and Eli took up residence at 259 S. Arlington Road in Akron while he worked in construction. Less than a year later on January 19, 1943, Eli answered the call to duty joining the Army for the duration of the war.

Eli and those who served with him were truly among The Greatest Generation<sup>6</sup> this country ever saw. The history of those days during World War II, told to me by my uncles during the earliest days of my boyhood, left an indelible impression upon me. The world owes these men and women a debt of gratitude beyond expression, for they had immeasurably changed the course of human history.

This is better expressed by the following introduction to a website dedicated to some of those who served:

*The image of the hero is important in any culture. Today young people tend to look up to comic book characters, pro wrestlers or action movie figures in search of heroes. The baby boom generation was fortunate enough to grow up living among real heroes. The men and women who, during the 1940's, were sent to the far corners of the earth to fight, and in many cases, give their lives, so that people everywhere could choose their own destiny free of tyranny and oppression. Think about it: If it wasn't for the efforts and sacrifices of these brave men and women, many of them still in their teens, the world would be a profoundly different place today.<sup>7</sup>*

In March 1944 the 21-year old Eli, by then already a Sergeant, was stationed at Camp Gruber, Oklahoma. Located 14-miles outside Muskogee, it's where he received the last of his infantry training in preparation for what was ahead, just three months away. Soon, he would be going to England.

Two days before his 22nd birthday Eli was among the soldiers of the 29th Infantry Division and other allied forces during the invasion of Normandy, France on "D-Day" June 6, 1944. Originally scheduled to arrive at Omaha Beach on the second day of the attack with the sixth wave, his unit was moved up to be part of the second wave instead. It was an assignment fraught with danger placing him among the very first group of American soldiers to strike. With an armada of more than 5,000 ships, it was the largest amphibious invasion in world history. Along the short stretches of four Normandy beaches nearly 4,500 allied ground troops would lose their lives to the heavily entrenched Germans on the cliffs above.

As dawn broke, the invasion, code-named *Operation Overlord*, to liberate France began with the first wave at exactly 6:36 a.m. Eli arrived there a few hours later. Most of those first attackers never made it to shore. The estimates are somewhere between 65-95% of them were killed or wounded. Eli naturally feared for his safety but said, he knew there was no alternative and "no turning back." The trip to cross the heavily patrolled 100-mile wide English Channel, between Portsmouth, England and the French coast, took several hours. From his landing craft he spent the early morning watching hundreds of airplanes fly overhead, and "a lot of artillery from behind directed to the enemy on shore", fired by the

15-inch guns of the U.S. Navy. Many of the 30 to 40 men aboard were seasick from the high rolling seas, the remnants of an earlier storm.

Of all the beaches at Normandy, none were more fiercely defended than Omaha. Lying in wait on cliffs 300 feet inland, and 150-feet above, were over 12-thousand German troops, half of them highly motivated, experienced combat soldiers. As Eli's boat finally approached the five-mile-long crescent-shaped beach the tension and anticipation of what lay ahead was enormous. Gunfire was heard in the not-so-far-off distance and suddenly, without warning, the bow of Eli's landing craft was struck by a mortar round. Unable to drop the front steel ramp, the Coast Guard pilot suddenly stopped the boat some distance short of the beach. It was totally unexpected, it was *supposed* to take them to the shore, chaos among the men took over. It was every man for himself, *nothing* was going as planned.



*A landing craft much like Eli's approaching the shores of Normandy, France*

The troops, now the target of machine gun fire, with utter abandon began to rush over the sides of the Higgins<sup>8</sup> boat lowering themselves into the water using ropes. Others just jumped overboard, *anything* to avoid being shot! While preparing to do the same Eli watched in horror as he saw soldiers, weighed down by their bulky equipment, struggle in a state of sheer panic and sink below the surface drowning in the 15-foot deep water. Others

desperately clawed for the side of the boat in a vain effort to stay afloat against the rough, choppy waters of the Channel. If the bullets didn't kill them, the water surely could. Realizing his dilemma, Eli quickly squirmed and twisted his upper body to remove one of his heavy packs before grabbing a rope and hastily lowering himself into the sea.

From the cliffs, protected by reinforced concrete bunkers, the German machine-gun fire grew more intense and pummeled the troops as they swam to shore. The German MG-42 machine gun was capable of shooting bursts of up to 1,500 rounds a minute. Eli was in the middle of a literal *blood bath*. As he frantically swam for the sandy beach he saw soldiers just a few feet away alive one second and ripped to pieces by machine-gun fire the next. Swimming about 20 yards until his feet could finally touch bottom he slowly thrashed and fought his way to the shore. All around him, while still under assault by guns large and small, from high above, were the dying as well as the lifeless floating bodies of American soldiers. Wreckage and debris from the first invading forces were strewn everywhere. "The water was red with blood. It was rougher than hell" Eli told me. "The biggest problem was pushing bodies out of your way to get in." Choked with emotion, he had little more to say about that day. By nine o'clock in the evening, Omaha was in allied hands. 156,000 allied troops and more than 20,000 vehicles had landed at Normandy.

If it were not for the brave paratroopers and glider pilots, who landed behind the lines, taking out the concrete fortifications, Eli said: "The American army would *never* have gotten through that heavily guarded beach." But a lot had also gone *wrong*. The history books are a testament to the fact, in its planning *and* execution, the invasion came close to being a total disaster. Ultimately though, Normandy turned out to be a huge victory, not only for the American servicemen, and others who fought there but for all the world. It was the beginning of the end for Hitler's long reign of terror and the Nazi occupation of Europe. The cost in American lives, however, was staggering. Between the machine-guns, the mines, the rifle and mortar fire, both off and on-shore, at Omaha Beach alone, 2,500 American soldiers were killed, wounded or missing. I was amazed how Eli's description of those events, as they fought to take control of that stretch of historic beach, so closely matched what I'd seen depicted in the 1998 movie *Saving Private Ryan*.<sup>9</sup>

That evening President Roosevelt addressed the nation for the first time about the Normandy invasion. His speech took the form of prayer and included the following:

*Almighty God: Our sons, pride of our nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our republic, our religion, and our civilization, and to set free a suffering humanity.*

*Lead them straight and true; give strength to their arms, stoutness to their hearts, steadfastness in their faith.*

*They will need Thy blessings. Their road will be long and hard. For the enemy is strong. He may hurl back our forces. Success may not come with rushing speed, but we shall return again and again; and we know that by Thy grace, and by the righteousness of our cause, our sons will triumph.*

Little did his family back home know, their son, brother, and uncle was that very night near Omaha Beach in the fight of his life engaging the German enemy. A week later Eli's brother Web would arrive at nearby Utah beach. His younger brother was already well inland by that time. In the next eighteen months, Web would serve in General George Patton's Third Army. Crisscrossing Europe, he would see some of the fiercest, non-stop fighting during the entire war. In the fall of 1944 Web would see 127 days of continuous combat before resting. Less than two months later he would endure another 87 consecutive days of combat. No one had greater respect for his combat service than his brother Eli who told me, when speaking of Web's outfit: "Those guys were the meanest fighting, sons-of-bitches in the war. They saw the worse of it for many months."

Eli said for "three continuous days I was never so scared in my life as we worked our way inland." Following the invasion, the first town they arrived at was Saint-Lo, France. The German army had occupied the town for the past four years. Being a strategic crossroads, Saint-Lo was almost totally destroyed during the Normandy invasion (95% according to most estimates). Known as *The Capital of the Ruins* there were questions raised whether to rebuild the town or to leave it as a testament to the heavy bombing it endured by both German and Allied air forces. It would be two weeks before Eli was able to remove his boots and when he did his socks had all but completely rotted away.

While in Europe Eli would serve in the 1st, 3rd & 7th Army as part of an engineer maintenance company. When not fighting, his work centered around retreading tanks and repairing them. They replaced motors and turrets and put blades on them so they could cut

through the hedgerow.<sup>10</sup> He told me "we did whatever was needed to keep the tanks in action."

He didn't share much more about his days in combat but Eli did relate to me one incident in which his outfit found themselves in a desperate situation. Exposed with little cover, and pinned down by German soldiers, they fought an all-night battle. During the fierce fighting, with the enemy enjoying the advantage of protection behind thick hedgerow, he witnessed fellow soldiers being slaughtered. Many were killed and wounded that night and he recalled their cries for help but, because of their exposure to enemy fire, no aid could be given. Early the next morning the attack came to an abrupt, unexpected end. The Germans, in an odd twist of events, had run out of ammunition!

Apparently on their own and unable to be resupplied they surrendered to the Americans. The Germans, with their hands raised above their shoulders, came through an opening in the hedgerow. As the enemy was ordered to gather together in a tight group, the American soldiers traded glances. No words were said, it wasn't necessary. Suddenly, out of anger and immense pent-up frustration, due to the horrendous ordeal they had suffered at the hands of their now captive enemy, the Americans opened fire and killed every one of the surrendering soldiers. When I asked my uncle if he had fired into the group, he paused and, with tears welling in his eyes, hesitantly admitted yes, he too had raised and fired his rifle. He said he didn't know if he'd actually taken the lives of any of them, but added, "well you know I never have liked hunting." It clearly was a painful memory for him and I know it was something he did not like to admit. I doubt he told many people about it. I debated repeating it here but, it is after all part of his story.

I once asked Eli why he was not an avid hunter like his brothers and nephews. He told me at the end of the war, when he turned in his rifle, he vowed he would never again raise another. He said, "I've had enough killing to last more than a lifetime." Combat leaves an indelible mark on those forced to endure it. One can only imagine how it affected and molded him, but you can be certain, it left a profound effect on him for the rest of his life.

Later during the war and while in France, Eli climbed the steps of the Eiffel Tower. Only half-way up though as the climb to the top had been closed due to the war. After the war with Germany came to an end in late April Eli ran into his brother Web at Bergen-Belsen<sup>11</sup>, a Nazi concentration camp in northern Germany. Years later they would separately describe to me

how together they watched British bulldozers push the bodies of hundreds of Jewish dead into huge open-pits. They also saw the ovens of the crematorium, used for the incineration of tens of thousands of bodies, and Web said, *"the place was rank with the smell of death."*

Finally, when it was time to return home Eli, now with the rank *Technician Fourth Grade*,<sup>12</sup> said there were two lines to process out. The first one was for the soldiers to receive their medals and the second, for the buses to head home. Eli told me, "I wasn't interested in any medals", so he skipped the first line and took his place in the second "to go home to Mary." He never made any effort to receive those well-earned ribbons and badges but, much later in the 1990s through the efforts of his children, he finally *did* receive them. Among them the *French Jubilee of Liberty Medal* awarded by the government of France in recognition of the men who participated in the Normandy campaign.







*Eli & Mary*

### ***Making a Life - Raising a Family (Akron)***

During all of his years as an adult, Eli *always* had a job. With a young family to support he once held three jobs to make ends meet. He never once collected a welfare or unemployment check. He said he wrote a personal check just once, only to ask for it back. He "worried someone might change the numbers." He always left the bill-paying to Mary.

After the war, he would work at a steel foundry. During the interview when asked if he'd ever operated a crane, Eli answered, "I used to run cranes all the time." He got the job. The fact was, Eli *never* operated a crane before, but somehow managed to pull it off. Later Eli would work at Goodyear, the largest employer in Akron, but didn't see any future for him there. In his efforts to find a better position he would stop-in every day at the smaller, family-owned RCA Rubber Company on East Market street and ask for a job. While there were no openings at the time, his efforts did not go unnoticed. After several months of seeing Eli's dogged determination and tenacity, RCA hired him. It was 1947.

In the years to come, Eli would work every job in the downstairs shop, including the mill and the press. He would work in the shop for more than twenty years where he came to know every piece of equipment and held every position there. He would drive truck and later became the foreman on the company dock. Over the years he would help several of his brother's secure work at RCA, but none of them stayed on very long. He'd help others,



family and otherwise, to find employment there, including his daughter Laura who worked in the front office for a short time following her high school graduation.



*Eli & Mary with their daughters Laura and Judy circa 1956*

Then one day in 1971 he was offered a job, "upstairs in the front office". He called Mary and told her the news asking, "what should I do?" Eli was apprehensive about taking on the job as he felt completely out of his element. He'd worked all these years in the shop, upstairs was where all the "big shots" were. But Mary, always supportive, encouraged him to take the job. They gave him an office and told him to hire a secretary. He told Mary "I don't know *how* to hire a secretary." She assured him he could handle it.

Eli struggled with his new-found responsibilities for the next several months. Discouraged, he went to Mr. Reiss, the president of the company, who they referred to as "R.T." and asked that he be allowed to return to the shop. "The old man" said, "no, we only move up here Eli, we *never* move down." It was a long time before he finally felt comfortable with his work. One of his tasks was to clean up his language from the "shop talk" he had grown accustomed to, to more appropriate speech that went along with his new status. Eli was uneasy about his ability to write and correspond properly. He hadn't gone beyond the eighth grade and often called Mary on the telephone, who'd graduated from high school, to help him with his spelling and other things. He would often take uncompleted work home. Eventually, after two or three years, Eli said: "I educated myself to the job and became comfortable with the work." He was often complimented for his "get to the point, write as he talked" abilities. His late-night homework would become a thing of the past and over

time he would find even hiring secretaries was a routine part of the job.

Then, in the spring of 1985, came another promotion when Eli was named Vice President of Purchasing. His success was a testament to the teamwork he and Mary shared throughout their long marriage. To say the least, his family were immensely proud of Eli's accomplishments. His sister Maxine, made sure the small-town newspaper back home, *The Clearfield Progress*, carried an article with a photograph noting his latest promotion.

During those years as a Vice President, he traveled often for business and took Mary with him regularly. Responsible for the acquisition of raw rubber from far-away places like Malaysia he remained in the position until he retired in about 1984. Following retirement, the company asked Eli to stay on the payroll as a consultant three days a week. They recognized his value and noted *no one* knew the business, or the equipment downstairs in the shop, as well as Eli. So, in that capacity, he stayed with the company, in a part-time position, for several more years and proved himself a valuable resource.

Throughout these years Eli and Mary raised their family in two modest homes in Akron, both within a few blocks of each other: The first on Flint Avenue and the other on Adelaide Blvd just off Brittain Road and across from East High School. Located a short distance from RCA, the homes were always meticulously maintained while Eli kept their yards manicured and trimmed like a thick green carpet. Never materialistic he took very good care of everything he owned, no doubt due in part to his growing up deprived, and having to work hard for everything he had.

Len Maher also had a lengthy career at RCA and became the Vice President of Operations, although Len said titles weren't used that much there. He'd worked with Eli for more than 20-years and the first memory he shared with me was about Eli's shoes. Len said, he "had the sharpest shoes I'd ever seen." Always polished to a high mirror gloss daughter Judy said, "you could see yourself in them." He was well-known for his impeccable clothing. Company policy required managers to wear coats and ties, no matter where they were in the building, even when on the shop floor, and Eli strictly adhered to the policy. His shiny shoes were so widely recognized around the company they were featured in a print ad RCA had created for a campaign to sell the rubber flooring they made.

Another thing Len remembered about Eli was how much he loved his Cadillacs, which he kept just as spotless as he did his shoes. Never purchased brand new, and each kept for many years in pristine condition, he probably owned three Cadillacs over his lifetime. Other than his apparel and those famous shoes, his cars were the only thing that could have been construed as "conspicuous" about Eli Lines.

Through the vast majority of the 20th-century, Akron was widely known as "the rubber capital of the world", producing more rubber products and especially automobile tires than anywhere else. In 1950, five of the six largest tire companies in the United States were located in Akron. At its peak RCA had over 350 employees but things changed. Competition got tough, technology and innovation by foreign companies, especially in tire manufacturing, was increasing while American manufacturers were hesitant to invest the enormous sums to keep up. RCA quit manufacturing tires and in 2005 closed it's Pulaski, Tennessee plant consolidating everything in Akron. It's a sad commentary on the economic plague that has affected so much of the rust belt of industrial America. Today RCA, now in its fourth generation of family ownership, is one of the few companies left manufacturing rubber products in Akron. Its employee numbers have dwindled to less than 75. But, since it's founding in 1931, the company has managed to secure a leadership position in the rubber flooring and stair-tread industry. I'd like to think, at least part of the credit, for their long-term success, belongs to my uncle who had worked for the company for more than 45-years of its first 60 years in business.

His daughter Judy fondly recalled family Christmases. Saying her dad was emotionally down during the holidays yet Eli was always excited about the holidays and happy for his children. No doubt, because he grew up poor and never received a single Christmas present as a boy, Judy said he "went overboard" when it came to providing for her and her sister Laura at Christmas. She remembered their entire living room would be stacked full with presents. Eli would always decorate their Cape Cod style home on Flint Street, stringing hundreds of Christmas lights on the house with Santa and his reindeer on the roof. People from all over the area would make a point to drive by the home just to see the Lines home with its holiday lights and decorations. Judy, in remembering those formative years wrote, "I had the good fortune to be 'happy' all of my childhood years, thanks to the love and devotion my parents gave me."

I have fond memories of a summer I spent with uncle Eli and his family in 1962. I was 9 years old while Judy was a freshman in high school, attending nearby East High. Her sister

Laura was 4½ years younger than her sister, and eleven months older than me. As an only child and the son of a single mom I was a bit wild and rudderless in those days getting into some mischief during the month or so I was there. Years after that summer, whenever we were together, Eli and Mary would laugh recalling memories during my visit with them. Judy and I still talk about the night I hid in her closet nearly scaring the life out of her while she sat on her bed eating a bowl of cereal. That summer was one filled with great memories I will forever cherish.

For many years Eli was an active member of the Masonic Order, advancing to become a 32<sup>nd</sup> degree Mason. He was also active with the Shriners., a group associated with the Masons best known for their charitable children's hospitals. Among the basic principles of Freemasonry are these:

*A moral code: Freemasons believe in honor and that a man has a responsibility to behave honorably in everything he does. Freemasonry teaches its members the principles of personal decency and personal responsibility. It hopes to inspire them to have charity and good will toward all mankind, and to translate principles and convictions into action.*

*Charity: Freemasonry is devoted to the promotion of the welfare and happiness of all mankind. Freemasonry teaches its members that unselfishness is a duty and that it's not only more blessed to give than to receive, but also more rewarding.*<sup>13</sup>

There is no question, Eli believed in those principles and embraced them in his life. He loved life and he loved people. He had *no* enemies. Nor were there any strangers, they were simply a friend he hadn't yet come to know. Among his family or his friends, he never held a grudge. His neighbors, who may not have known him by name, saw first-hand his friendly and outgoing demeanor. During the spring and summer while sitting on the porch of his house he'd always have a big smile and a wave for those driving by. Most of them would wave back. During the winter snows, Eli would drive around his neighborhood, on his riding mower with a front-end plow attached, clearing his neighbor's sidewalks and driveways. People *wanted* to be around Eli. It was contagious. His positive attitude, good-nature and spirit made everyone feel better about themselves and about the world around them. Judy said, "by his example, he has taught me to have respect not only for myself but for others

too, the value of forgiving and to never judge anyone less fortunate than yourself. He was kind and generous to everyone no matter what walk of life they came from."

Then there was his humor. He'd kid and he'd prod you. During my 1987 visit, I remember when we'd leave the house he always wore a baseball hat, chosen from a collection of about a dozen. With self-deprivation, he'd refer to himself as "just an old man with a hat." One time when we were talking about an elderly relative who'd recently passed away I commented: "well they were old." His tongue-in-cheek response was "Old!? Hell, 90 Ain't old when you're 66!" Now, some three decades later, I've come to appreciate the truth in his words.

All of Judy and Laura's school friends loved and respected Eli and Mary. Their home was always opened to them and the kids had many parties there. Eli and Mary welcomed them with open arms. When some of these friends had problems or issues in life, they'd often go to Eli for his sound advice. Judy recalled a neighbor boy whose father wouldn't allow him to work on his motorcycle in his spotless garage. Eli, whose garage was always clean and well-organized, didn't care and let the boy use his garage whenever he needed. She also fondly recalled when, in later life, her father would take to the neighborhood streets in his electric scooter. She went with him one day and was *amazed* by the number of people who knew him and spoke to him blocks away from his home.

Eli was a friend to *everyone*, young and old. Well-liked, respected and admired by all who knew him, everyone thought very highly of Eli. He was universally recognized as a good man, a good neighbor, friend, father, and husband. But, he was a modest man who understood he wasn't perfect. He never bragged or spoke of his accomplishments unless asked. Even then, his response was always based on humility.

Ironically Eli's success was a two-edged sword. With human nature and family dynamics as is often the case, a few of his siblings thought him a bit conceited and self-absorbed in his own immediate family with little time for anybody else. Because of his success, they accused him (always behind his back) of thinking himself better than the others. Of course, they were blatantly *false* accusations. In-fact Eli was the *exact* opposite. His detractors didn't really know him. Their petty jealousies hurt Eli tremendously, cutting him to the very core, but, he never took issue with these attacks. He lived by example. He loved his brothers and sisters and would remain silent. It did, however, cause him to draw ever-closer to his wife and daughters, *they* were the love of his life, he loved them immensely and they

were the reason for his very existence. I was young and naive in those days and trusted in the things I'd heard, I was easily swayed. I'm sorry to admit it, and I *acutely* regret it, but unfortunately and unnecessarily, the gossip, affected my relationship with my uncle for more than a decade. It was a life-lesson that, when I came to realize the error, profoundly changed me as an adult.

The family spent a lot of time visiting his sister Ruby's family as well as get-togethers with his brother John who also had two daughters. All lived nearby. They had close relationships with Mary's siblings as well. Her father, who once didn't approve of Eli, now held him in the highest esteem. Among his son-in-laws, Eli was his favorite. Cousins became close with other cousins. Long-term bonds were created and continue to this day. Daughter Judy said, "We always looked forward to taking our family vacations. After we were grown and he and my mother would take their vacations together, he was always anxious to get back home to his family. He would say to my mom it was time to go back home because he missed his family so much."

Eli and Mary led active and energetic lives together with friends and especially their children and grandchildren. They enjoyed boating for many years owning several small speedboats, one affectionally named the "Judi Lori" after their daughters. Later they bought a trailer for camping and used it a lot during the spring and summer months becoming friends with other couples having the same interests.

Fishing was a big part of Eli's life. He loved it. Co-worker Len Maher recalled some of the suppliers at RCA would take them on fishing trips. Len said, "Eli *a/ways* sat in the left rear seat on the boats. Everyone knew that was Eli's seat." He'd tell his fishing companions he was going to catch the most and biggest fish among them. Len said he was often right and recalled Eli "used to spray WD-40 on his fishing lures, and it worked!" RCA would charter a fishing boat every year and they'd fish for Walleye on Lake Erie. Eli mounted a couple of his biggest catches which he later gave to his grandson Kurt.

To everyone who had the privilege of knowing them, it was obvious, Eli and Mary loved each other and their family with a passion every married couple should aspire to. Whenever you saw them together, you could see how much they loved and adored one another. Mary complimented Eli's weaknesses with her strengths, of which she had many. Together they were a life-long example of respect, friendship, love, and partnership.



### ***The Final Years***

Even in retirement, there was no slowing down for Eli. After his years as a consultant ended at RCA, he took a part-time job with a local body shop owned by a close family friend, located a short distance from his home. His work there included answering the phone and running errands picking up parts. His life was still go, go, go. I recall during my visit in 1987, when we'd go out to eat, Eli never saw any purpose, when the meal was over, in sitting around and talking. I was used to several minutes of leisure conversation and relaxing on those occasions. But, with Eli, when the meal was over, as soon as the bill was paid it was time to go!

Eli's health inevitably began to slowly deteriorate over the years. Among his ailments, he'd undergone two surgeries and suffered a stroke in July of 1997. He successfully recovered from the first stroke with few issues and returned to his job at the body shop. A local Akron television station, using him as an example, did a news story about the importance of getting immediate care when it's suspected you're having a stroke.

Sometime during these years, he began using a walker, because of a bad hip. It was an

injury he blamed on his years of repeatedly jumping off the dock at work. Using the walker made it easy to get around the house without worrying about falling. Years later he would look into a hip replacement but was turned down due to his health and age.

In early 2001 at the age of 78, Eli suffered a second stroke. This one was worse than the first and over time it took its toll affecting Eli's speech. Eventually, because of his speech problems, and difficulty in getting around, he gave up his job at the body shop and driving the car was left to Mary. But he would remain in contact with his former employer, riding down on his scooter for visits. Daughter Laura in writing about his part-time job recalls: "It gave him something to do. Daddy was never someone that liked just sitting. He worked there before the strokes and went back when he recovered. Daddy never lost the desire to work, he would always say he wanted to 'get better and get back to work'."

Then in late 2006, during one of our occasional phone conversations, I learned Eli had continued to falter. He got on the phone as he always did when I called and was having a rough time of it. His voice was much weaker than our previous conversations. He could barely speak and for the first time had such difficulty talking he gave up in frustration, handing the phone back to Mary. To say the least, it was upsetting, even alarming, for me to realize just how much he had deteriorated since I had spoken to him about six months earlier. I remember crying after hanging up and thinking those long conversations I had enjoyed, over those many years, were now very likely a thing of the past.

The following year I had the opportunity to see my uncle twice during the late summer and early fall when traveling through Ohio. Still using a walker with assistance around the house he now relied on a wheelchair, when venturing outside for doctor appointments and other things, as it was easier and safer to move him. Mary always worried that Eli would fall and he did many times.

With his limited speech, he was only able to communicate just a few words, mostly strained yeses and no's to questions asked. His strong spirit, wonderful personality, and ever-present grin remained, but much of who he was, was locked inside unable to express himself. My fiancé Mercedes and I had an especially enjoyable visit with my aunt and uncle in October of 2007 and when we left their home it was with the knowledge I might not see him again. Nevertheless, it was a blessing to visit with him and to truly enjoy his company for what *would be* the final time.





*Me and Mercedes with Uncle Eli - October 2007*

Over the next eighteen months, I stayed in contact by phone and would always speak to him, despite the difficulties. We'd say hello to one another and I'd let him know things were well. He'd reply to my comments as best he could with labored effort. I would always tell him I loved him and found comfort in knowing he understood. But as his health continued to decline the time came when he could no longer speak on the phone at all. So, I would pass on my messages of love, admiration, and concern through aunt Mary.

Then on April 21, 2009, came the news. Uncle Eli had passed away at the age of 86 leaving behind his wife of 67 years, his two daughters, three grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

## ***Epilogue***

It was the end of an era, an entire generation was gone. Eli was the last survivor of his twelve siblings. In every sense, his life was a Horatio Alger<sup>14</sup> story. A self-made man who, from his impoverished, difficult and unsettled boyhood, rose to live a respectable middle-class life through hard work, determination, and honesty.

He was not large in stature, nevertheless he was a giant among men with a special gift of blessing the lives of all who knew him with his humor, his smile, laughter, and good-nature. He had a genuine love and devotion to God, country, family, and friends. He was a patriot who gave unwavering service on behalf of his country. He was proud to have served but was not proud of what he had to do to fulfill what he felt was his duty.

I am grateful he was my uncle and am so thankful for the love he and Mary had given me over the years. I was truly blessed by the special relationship we shared. My life is so much the better because of it and I sorely regret my children never got to know him. He was one of the finest men I've ever known and I look forward to seeing him once again.

As mentioned early in this biography, Eli told me on several occasions how he always hoped to make his life worthwhile and how he wanted "to be somebody" so he could "show the people back home that a Lines could amount to something." I don't think there is any doubt, in the sunset years of his life, he could look back with the satisfaction in knowing he'd accomplished *everything* he had set out to do *and* a whole lot more. I believe he was a man with few regrets.

No greater honor can be paid to Eli than in the words of those who knew him best. On the ninth anniversary of his death, his granddaughter Brigit posted this on her Facebook page.

*I've never known a greater man in my entire life as my "pap"....*

*Everything about him was an example of uncompromising strength - his faith in God, his work ethic and, beyond measure, his love for his family.*

Daughter Judy in writing closing comments about her father said:

*His hands were strong working hands, yet gentle enough to wipe away a tear or give a hug when needed. He had an abiding love for God and a strong faith in prayer. Through the years he had faced a lot of physical challenges. But he had a spirit of perseverance. He fought hard and never gave up. He would always tell us not to worry, if God decided it was his time, he was prepared to go.*

Eli's younger daughter Laura expressed her thoughts writing:

*Daddy was the best and I miss him every single day. He was a hard working man but such a gentle soul and the love he felt for his family was always there in his eyes. I never once in my entire life wondered how he felt: You heard it in his voice, you saw it in his eyes, you felt it with his touch. I miss hearing him tell me "I love you" whenever I walked into the house. The huge void I feel in my heart without him is because of the wonderful man and father he was, but I will always feel his love.*

And finally years earlier, Eli's first cousin Ray Lines, Jr., a retired Army Colonel, expressed his admiration, with just five words, when he said: "there was *nobody* like Eli."

§



*Eli Enlo Lines (1922-2009)*

NOTE: Copies of this file in various formats, and with its latest revision, can be read and downloaded at the following link:

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Comments, questions, and observations are always appreciated.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://bit.ly/RixxWordPressBlog>

<sup>2</sup> Enlo Wisor was the son of Miles and Elvira (Freeman) Wisor.

<sup>3</sup> The Glen Mills School House of Refuge for Boys is located in Thornbury Township, Delaware County, PA. Eli's brother Web was there in 1930 at the age of thirteen. Located about 220 miles from Curwensville. See Wikipedia: "Glen Mills Schools"

<sup>4</sup> The Civilian Conservation Corps was a work relief program under the Roosevelt Administration for unemployed young men from all walks of life. Eventually, 3 million men worked in the program, preserving the American landscape, controlling erosion, developing national parks and planting hundreds of millions of trees.

<sup>5</sup> At the time A&P was one of the largest businesses in the country with thousands of stores. It dramatically changed American lives and the way they shopped. It would later become the largest retailer in the United States.

<sup>6</sup> A term coined by journalist Tom Brokaw to describe the generation who grew up in the United States during the deprivations of the Great Depression, and then went on to fight in World War II. In his 1998 book *The Greatest Generation*, Brokaw wrote: "It is, I believe, the greatest generation any society has ever produced."

<sup>7</sup> <http://463rd.org/mission.htm> (2018)

<sup>8</sup> Used extensively in amphibious landings during World War II, General Dwight Eisenhower said, "Andrew Higgins ... is the man who won the war for us. ... If Higgins had not designed and built [them], we never could have landed over an open beach. The whole strategy of the war would have been different."

<sup>9</sup> The film, starring Tom Hanks, is notable for the intensity of its opening 27 minutes, which depicts that first day's assault on Omaha Beach. But, to this writer's estimation, despite the intensity, the moviemakers made it look easier than it actually was.

<sup>10</sup> Dating back hundreds of years hedgerows were a line of densely spaced shrubs and trees, planted on mounds of earth, to form a barrier. They were virtually impossible to penetrate and considered a nightmare for the American Infantry.

<sup>11</sup> It's believed at least 70,000 died at Bergen-Belsen between 1941 and 1945. When liberated by the British in April 1945 there were about 60,000 prisoners in the camp, most of them half-starved and seriously ill. Another 13,000 corpses lay around the camp unburied. It is the same camp where author/diarist Ann Frank and her sister Margot died.

<sup>12</sup> Tech Sergeant, Technician 4th Grade or T-4 is equivalent to an E-5 in today's army. While

many soldiers retained the rank of private throughout the war, apparently Eli had been an exemplary soldier to have advanced as far as he had.

<sup>13</sup> The Basic Principle of Freemasons, Freemasons for Dummies, Dummies.com.

<sup>14</sup> Alger (1832-1899) was an American writer best known for his novels about impoverished boys and their rise from humble backgrounds to lives of middle-class security. His writings characterized by the "rags to riches" narrative, had a formative effect on America during the Gilded Age.